TWO PLAYS FOR DANCERS
BY W. B. YEATS

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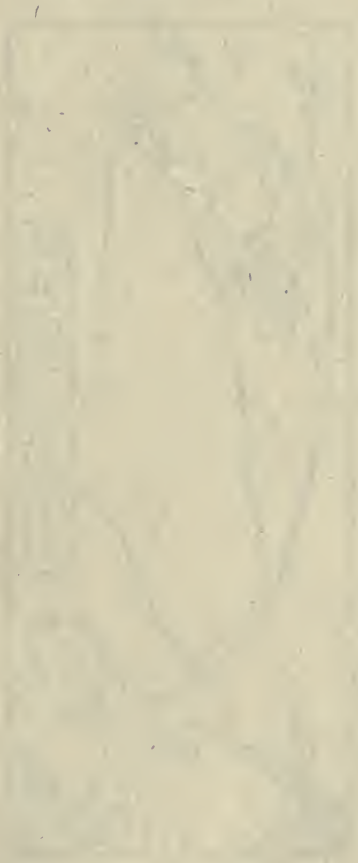

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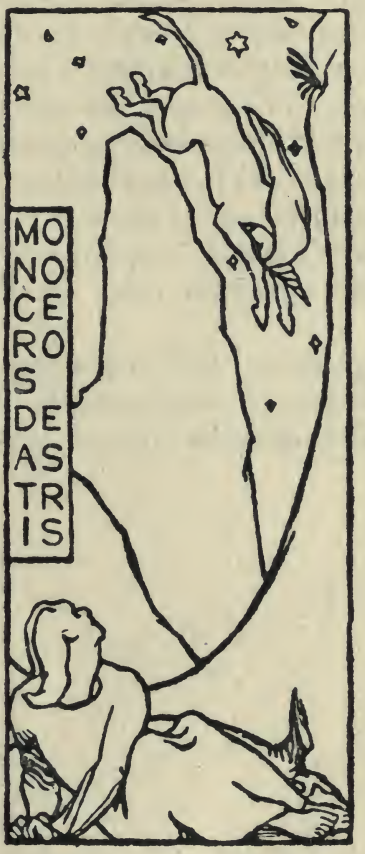

THE CUALA PRESS
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TWO PLAYS FOR DANCERS

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PREFACE

In a note at the end of my last book 'The Wild Swans at Coole' (Cuala Press.) I explained why I preferred this kind of drama, and where I had found my models, and where and how my first play after this kind was performed, and when and how I would have it performed in the future. I can but refer the reader to the note or to the long introduction to 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan' (Cuala Press.)

W. B. Yeats. October 11th. 1918

P. S. That I might write 'The Dreaming of the Bones,' Mr. W. A. Henderson with great kindness wrote out for me all historical allusions to Dervorgilla.

THE DREAMING OF THE BONES

The stage is any bare place in a room close to the wall. A screen with a pattern of mountain and sky can stand against the wall, or a curtain with a like pattern hang upon it, but the pattern must only symbolize or suggest. One musician enters and then two others, the first stands singing while the others take their places. Then all three sit down against the wall by their instruments, which are already there—a drum, a zither, and a flute. Or they unfold a cloth as in 'The Hawk's Well,' while the instruments are carried in.

FIRST MUSICIAN
(or all three musicians, singing)

Why does my heart beat so?
Did not a shadow pass?
It passed but a moment ago.
Who can have trod in the grass?
What rogue is night-wandering?
Have not old writers said
That dizzy dreams can spring
From the dry bones of the dead?
And many a night it seems
That all the valley fills
With those fantastic dreams.
They overflow the hills,
So passionate is a shade,

Like wine that fills to the top
A grey-green cup of jade,
Or maybe an agate cup.
(speaking) The hour before dawn and the moon covered up.
The little village of Abbey is covered up;
The little narrow trodden way that runs
From the white road to the Abbey of Corcomroe
Is covered up; and all about the hills
Are like a circle of Agate or of Jade.
Somewhere among great rocks on the scarce grass
Birds cry, they cry their loneliness.
Even the sunlight can be lonely here,
Even hot noon is lonely. I hear a footfall—
A young man with a lantern comes this way.
He seems an Aran fisher, for he wears
The flannel bawneen and the cow-hide shoe.
He stumbles wearily, and stumbling prays.
(A young man enters, praying in Irish)
Once more the birds cry in their loneliness,
But now they wheel about our heads; and now
They have dropped on the grey stone to the north-east.
(A man and a girl both in the costume of a past time,
come in. They wear heroic masks)

YOUNG MAN

(raising his lantern)

Who is there? I cannot see what you are like,
Come to the light.

STRANGER

But what have you to fear?

YOUNG MAN

And why have you come creeping through the dark.
(The Girl blows out lantern)
The wind has blown my lantern out. Where are you?
I saw a pair of heads against the sky
And lost them after, but you are in the right
I should not be afraid in County Clare;
And should be or should not be have no choice,
I have to put myself into your hands,
Now that my candle's out.

STRANGER

You have fought in Dublin?

YOUNG MAN

I was in the Post Office, and if taken
I shall be put against a wall and shot.

STRANGER

You know some place of refuge, have some plan
Or friend who will come to meet you?

YOUNG MAN

I am to lie
At daybreak on the mountain and keep watch
Until an Aran coracle puts in
At Muckanish or at the rocky shore
Under Finvarra, but would break my neck
If I went stumbling there alone in the dark.

STRANGER

We know the pathways that the sheep tread out,
And all the hiding-places of the hills,
And that they had better hiding-places once.

YOUNG MAN

You'd say they had better before English robbers
Cut down the trees or set them upon fire
For fear their owners might find shelter there.
What is that sound?

STRANGER

An old horse gone astray
He has been wandering on the road all night.

YOUNG MAN

I took him for a man and horse. Police
Are out upon the roads. In the late Rising
I think there was no man of us but hated
To fire at soldiers who but did their duty
And were not of our race, but when a man
Is born in Ireland and of Irish stock
When he takes part against us—

STRANGER

I will put you safe,
No living man shall set his eyes upon you.
I will not answer for the dead.

YOUNG MAN

The dead?

STRANGER

For certain days the stones where you must lie
Have in the hour before the break of day
Been haunted.

YOUNG MAN

But I was not born at midnight.

STRANGER

Many a man born in the full daylight
Can see them plain, will pass them on the high-road
Or in the crowded market-place of the town,
And never know that they have passed.

YOUNG MAN

My Grandam
Would have it they did penance everywhere
Or lived through their old lives again.

STRANGER

In a dream;
And some for an old scruple must hang spitted
Upon the swaying tops of lofty trees;
Some are consumed in fire, some withered up
By hail and sleet out of the wintry North,
And some but live through their old lives again.

YOUNG MAN

Well, let them dream into what shape they please
And fill waste mountains with the invisible tumult
Of the fantastic conscience. I have no dread;
They cannot put me into jail or shoot me,

And seeing that their blood has returned to fields
That have grown red from drinking blood like mine
They would not if they could betray.

STRANGER

This pathway
Runs to the ruined Abbey of Corcomroe;
The Abbey passed, we are soon among the stone
And shall be at the ridge before the cocks
Of Aughanish or Bailevlehan
Or grey Aughtmana shake their wings and cry.
(They go round the stage once)

FIRST MUSICIAN

(speaking) They've passed the shallow well and the flat stone
Fouled by the drinking cattle, the narrow lane
Where mourners for five centuries have carried
Noble or peasant to his burial.
An owl is crying out above their heads.
(singing) Why should the heart take fright
What sets it beating so?
The bitter sweetness of the night
Has made it but a lonely thing.
Red bird of March, begin to crow,
Up with the neck and clap the wing,
Red cock, and crow.
(They go once round the stage. The first musician speaks.)
And now they have climbed through the long grassy field

And passed the ragged thorn trees and the gap
In the ancient hedge; and the tomb-nested owl
At the foot's level beats with a vague wing.
(singing) My head is in a cloud;
I'd let the whole world go.
My rascal heart is proud
Remembering and remembering.
Red bird of March, begin to crow,
Up with the neck and clap the wing
Red cock and crow.
(They go round the stage. The first musician speaks.)
They are among the stones above the ash
Above the briar and thorn and the scarce grass;
Hidden amid the shadow far below them
The cat-headed bird is crying out.
(singing) The dreaming bones cry out
Because the night winds blow
And heaven's a cloudy blot;
Calamity can have its fling.
Red bird of March begin to crow,
Up with the neck and clap the wing
Red cock and crow.

THE STRANGER

We're almost at the summit and can rest.
The road is a faint shadow there; and there
The abbey lies amid its broken tombs.
In the old days we should have heard a bell

Calling the monks before day broke to pray;
And when the day has broken on the ridge,
The crowing of its cocks.

YOUNG MAN

Is there no house
Famous for sanctity or architectural beauty
In Clare or Kerry, or in all wide Connacht
The enemy has not unroofed?

STRANGER

Close to the altar
Broken by wind and frost and worn by time
Donogh O'Brien has a tomb, a name in Latin.
He wore fine clothes and knew the secrets of women
But he rebelled against the King of Thomond
And died in his youth.

YOUNG MAN

And why should he rebel?
The King of Thomond was his rightful master.
It was men like Donogh who made Ireland weak —
My curse on all that troop, and when I die
I'll leave my body, if I have any choice,
Far from his ivy tod and his owl; have those
Who, if your tale is true, work out a penance
Upon the mountain-top where I am to hide,
Come from the Abbey graveyard?

THE GIRL

They have not that luck,

But are more lonely, those that are buried there,
Warred in the heat of the blood; if they were rebels
Some momentary impulse made them rebels
Or the comandment of some petty king
Who hated Thomond. Being but common sinners,
No callers in of the alien from oversea
They and their enemies of Thomond's party
Mix in a brief dream battle above their bones,
Or make one drove or drift in amity,
Or in the hurry of the heavenly round
Forget their earthly names; these are alone
Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN

And if what seems is true
And there are more upon the other side
Than on this side of death, many a ghost
Must meet them face to face and pass the word
Even upon this grey and desolate hill.

YOUNG GIRL

Until this hour no ghost or living man
Has spoken though seven centuries have run
Since they, weary of life and of men's eyes,
Flung down their bones in some forgotten place
Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN

I have heard that there are souls
Who, having sinned after a monstrous fashion

Take on them, being dead, a monstrous image
To drive the living, should they meet its face,
Crazy, and be a terror to the dead.

YOUNG GIRL

But these
Were comely even in their middle life
And carry, now that they are dead, the image
Of their first youth, for it was in that youth
Their sin began.

YOUNG MAN

I have heard of angry ghosts
Who wander in a wilful solitude.

THE GIRL

These have no thought but love; nor joy
But that upon the instant when their penance
Draws to its height and when two hearts are wrung
Nearest to breaking, if hearts of shadows break,
His eyes can mix with hers; nor any pang
That is so bitter as that double glance,
Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN

But what is this strange penance—
That when their eyes have met can wring them most?

THE GIRL

Though eyes can meet, their lips can never meet.

YOUNG MAN

And yet it seems they wander side by side.

But doubtless you would say that when lips meet
And have not living nerves, it is no meeting.

THE GIRL

Although they have no blood or living nerves
Who once lay warm and live the live-long night
In one another's arms, and know their part
In life, being now but of the people of dreams,
Is a dreams part; although they are but shadows
Hovering between a thorn tree and a stone
Who have heaped up night on winged night; although
No shade however harried and consumed
Would change his own calamity for theirs,
Their manner of life were blessed could their lips
A moment meet; but when he has bent his head
Close to her head or hand would slip in hand
The memory of their crime flows up between
And drives them apart.

YOUNG MAN

The memory of a crime—
He took her from a husband's house it may be,
But does the penance for a passionate sin
Last for so many centuries?

THE GIRL

No, no,
The man she chose, the man she was chosen by
Cared little and cares little from whose house
They fled towards dawn amid the flights of arrows

Or that it was a husband's and a king's;
And how if that were all could she lack friends
On crowded roads or on the unpeopled hill?
Helen herself had opened wide the door
Where night by night she dreams herself awake
And gathers to her breast a dreaming man.

YOUNG MAN

What crime can stay so in the memory?
What crime can keep apart the lips of lovers
Wandering and alone?

THE GIRL

Her king and lover
Was overthrown in battle by her husband
And for her sake and for his own, being blind
And bitter and bitterly in love, he brought
A foreign army from across the sea.

YOUNG MAN

You speak of Dermot and of Dervorgilla
Who brought the Norman in?

THE GIRL

Yes, yes I spoke
Of that most miserable, most accursed pair
Who sold their country into slavery, and yet
They were not wholly miserable and accursed
If somebody of their race at last would say:
'I have forgiven them.'

YOUNG MAN

Oh, never, never
Will Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.

THE GIRL

If someone of their race forgave at last
Lip would be pressed on lip.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, never, never
Will Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.
You have told your story well, so well indeed
I could not help but fall into the mood
And for a while believe that it was true
Or half believe, but better push on now.
The horizon to the East is growing bright.
(They go once round stage)
So here we're on the summit. I can see
The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills,
And Galway in the breaking light; there too
The enemy has toppled wall and roof
And torn from ancient walls to boil his pot
The oaken panelling that had been dear
To generations of children and old men.
But for that pair for whom you would have my pardon
It might be now like Bayeux or like Caen
Or little Italian town amid its walls
For though we have neither coal nor iron ore
To make us rich and cover heaven with smoke

Our country, if that crime were uncommitted
Had been most beautiful. Why do you dance?
Why do you gaze and with so passionate eyes
One on the other and then turn away
Covering your eyes and weave it in a dance,
Who are you? what are you? you are not natural.

THE GIRL

Seven hundred years our lips have never met.

YOUNG MAN

Why do you look so strangely at one another,
So strangely and so sweetly?

THE GIRL

Seven hundred years.

YOUNG MAN

So strangely and so sweetly. All the ruin,
All, all their handiwork is blown away
As though the mountain air had blown it away
Because their eyes have met. They cannot hear,
Being folded up and hidden in their dance.
The dance is changing now. They have dropped their eyes,
They have covered up their eyes as though their hearts
Had suddenly been broken— never, never
Shall Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.
They have drifted in the dance from rock to rock.
They have raised their hands as though to snatch the sleep
That lingers always in the abyss of the sky
Though they can never reach it. A cloud floats up

And covers all the mountain head in a moment.
And now it lifts and they are swept away.
I had almost yielded and forgiven it all—
This is indeed a place of terrible temptation.
(The Musicians begin unfolding and folding a black cloth. The First Musician comes forward to the front of the stage, at the centre. He holds the cloth before him. The other two come one on either side and unfold it. They afterwards fold it up in the same way. While it is unfolded, the Young Man leaves the stage)

THE MUSICIANS

I

(singing) At the grey round of the hill
Music of a lost kingdom
Runs, runs and is suddenly still.
The winds out of Clare-Galway
Carry it: suddenly it is still.

I have heard in the night air
A wandering airy music;
And moidered in that snare
A man is lost of a sudden,
In that sweet wandering snare.

What finger first began
Music of a lost kingdom.

They dreamed that laughed in the sun.
Dry bones that dream are bitter,
They dream and darken our sun.

Those crazy fingers play
A wandering airy music;
Our luck is withered away,
And wheat in the wheat-ear withered,
And the wind blows it away.

II

My heart ran wild when it heard
The curlew cry before dawn
And the eddying cat-headed bird;
But now the night is gone.
I have heard from far below
The strong March birds a-crow,
Stretch neck and clap the wing,
Red cocks, and crow.

THE ONLY JEALOUSY OF EMER

Enter Musicians, who are dressed as in the earlier play. They have the same musical instruments, which can either be already upon the stage or be brought in by the First Musician before he stands in the centre with the cloth between his hands, or by a player when the cloth is unfolded. The stage as before can be against the wall of any room.

FIRST MUSICIAN

(During the unfolding and folding of the cloth)
A woman's beauty is like a white
Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone
At daybreak after stormy night
Between two furrows upon the ploughed land:
A sudden storm and it was thrown
Between dark furrows upon the ploughed land.
How many centuries spent
The sedentary soul
In toils of measurement
Beyond eagle or mole,
Beyond hearing or seeing,
Or Archimedes guess,
To raise into being
That loveliness?

A strange unserviceable thing,
A fragile, exquisite, pale shell,

That the vast troubled waters bring
To the loud sands before day has broken.
The storm arose and suddenly fell
Amid the dark before day had broken.
What death? what discipline?
What bonds no man could unbind
Being imagined within
The labyrinth of the mind?
What pursuing or fleeing?
What wounds, what bloody press?
Dragged into being
This loveliness.

(When the cloth is folded again the Musicians take their place against wall. The folding of the cloth shows on one side of the stage the curtained bed or litter on which lies a man in his grave-clothes. He wears an heroic mask. Another man with exactly similar clothes and mask crouches near the front. Emer is sitting beside the bed.)

FIRST MUSICIAN

(speaking) I call before the eyes a roof
With cross-beams darkened by smoke.
A fisher's net hangs from a beam,
A long oar lies against the wall.
I call up a poor fisher's house.
A man lies dead or swooning,
That amorous man,

That amorous, violent man, renowned Cuchulain,
Queen Emer at his side.
At her own bidding all the rest have gone.
But now one comes on hesitating feet,
Young Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's mistress.
She stands a moment in the open door,
Beyond the open door the bitter sea,
The shining, bitter sea is crying out,
(singing) White shell, white wing
I will not choose for my friend
A frail unserviceable thing
That drifts and dreams, and but knows
That waters are without end
And that wind blows.

EMER

(speaking) Come hither, come sit down beside the bed
You need not be afraid, for I myself
Sent for you, Eithne Inguba.

EITHNE INGUBA

No, Madam,
I have too deeply wronged you to sit there.

EMER

Of all the people in the world we two,
And we alone, may watch together here,
Because we have loved him best.

EITHNE INGUBA

And is he dead?

EMER

Although they have dressed him out in his grave-clothes
And stretched his limbs, Cuchulain is not dead;
The very heavens when that day's at hand,
So that his death may not lack ceremony,
Will throw out fires, and the earth grow red with blood.
There shall not be a scullion but foreknows it
Like the world's end.

EITHNE INGUBA

How did he come to this?

EMER

Towards noon in the assembly of the kings
He met with one who seemed a while most dear.
The kings stood round; some quarrel was blown up;
He drove him out and killed him on the shore
At Baile's tree, and he who was so killed
Was his own son begot on some wild woman
When he was young, or so I have heard it said;
And thereupon, knowing what man he had killed,
And being mad with sorrow, he ran out;
And after to his middle in the foam
With shield before him and with sword in hand,
He fought the deathless sea. The kings looked on
And not a king dared stretch an arm, or even
Dared call his name, but all stood wondering
In that dumb stupor like cattle in a gale,
Until at last, as though he had fixed his eyes

On a new enemy, he waded out
Until the water had swept over him;
But the waves washed his senseless image up
And laid it at this door.

EITHNE INGUBA

How pale he looks!

EMER

He is not dead.

EITHNE INGUBA

You have not kissed his lips
Nor laid his head upon your breast.

EMER

It may be
An image has been put into his place,
A sea-born log bewitched into his likeness,
Or some stark horseman grown too old to ride
Among the troops of Mananan, Son of the Sea,
Now that his joints are stiff.

EITHNE INGUBA

Cry out his name.
All that are taken from our sight, they say,
Loiter amid the scenery of their lives
For certain hours or days, and should he hear
He might, being angry drive the changeling out.

EMER

It is hard to make them hear amid their darkness,
And it is long since I could call him home;

I am but his wife, but if you cry aloud
With that sweet voice that is so dear to him
He cannot help but listen.

EITHNE INGUBA

He loves me best,
Being his newest love, but in the end
Will love the woman best who loved him first
And loved him through the years when love seemed lost.

EMER

I have that hope, the hope that some day and somewhere
We'll sit together at the hearth again.

EITHNE INGUBA

Women like me when the violent hour is over
Are flung into some corner like old nut shells.
Cuchulain, listen.

EMER

No, not yet for first
I'll cover up his face to hide the sea;
And throw new logs upon the hearth and stir
The half burnt logs until they break in flame.
Old Mananan's unbridled horses come
Out of the sea and on their backs his horsemen
But all the enchantments of the dreaming foam
Dread the hearth fire.

(She pulls the curtains of the bed so as to hide the sick man's face, that the actor may change his mask unseen. She goes to one side of platform and moves

her hand as though putting logs on a fire and stirring it into a blaze. While she makes these movements the Musicians play, marking the movements with drum and flute perhaps.
Having finished she stands beside the imaginary fire at a distance from Cuchulain & Eithne Inguba.)

Call on Cuchulain now.

EITHNE INGUBA

Can you not hear my voice.

EMER

Bend over him.
Call out dear secrets till you have touched his heart
If he lies there; and if he is not there
Till you have made him jealous.

EITHNE INGUBA

Cuchulain, listen.

EMER

You speak too timidly; to be afraid
Because his wife is but three paces off
When there is so great a need were but to prove
The man that chose you made but a poor choice.
We're but two women struggling with the sea.

EITHNE INGUBA

O my beloved pardon me, that I
Have been ashamed and you in so great need.
I have never sent a message or called out,
Scarce had a longing for your company

But you have known and come; and if indeed
You are lying there stretch out your arms and speak;
Open your mouth and speak for to this hour
My company has made you talkative.
Why do you mope, and what has closed your ears.
Our passion had not chilled when we were parted
On the pale shore under the breaking dawn.
He will not hear me: or his ears are closed
And no sound reaches him.

EMER

Then kiss that image
The pressure of your mouth upon his mouth
May reach him where he is.

EITHNE INGUBA

(starting back) It is no man.
I felt some evil thing that dried my heart
When my lips touched it.

EMER

No, his body stirs;
The pressure of your mouth has called him home;
He has thrown the changeling out.

EITHNE INGUBA

(going further off) Look at that arm
That arm is withered to the very socket.

EMER

(going up to the bed)
What do you come for and from where?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

I have come
From Mananan's court upon a bridleless horse.

EMER

What one among the Sidhe has dared to lie
Upon Cuchulain's bed and take his image?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

I am named Bricriu— not the man— that Bricriu,
Maker of discord among gods and men,
Called Bricriu of the Sidhe.

EMER

Come for what purpose?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

(sitting up and showing its distorted face. Eithne Inguba goes out)
I show my face and everything he loves
Must fly away.

EMER

You people of the wind
Are full of lying speech and mockery.
I have not fled your face.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

You are not loved.

EMER

And therefore have no dread to meet your eyes
And to demand him of you.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

For that I have come.
You have but to pay the price and he is free.

EMER

Do the Sidhe bargain?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

When they set free a captive
They take in ransom a less valued thing.
The fisher when some knowledgeable man
Restores to him his wife, or son, or daughter,
Knows he must lose a boat or net, or it may be
The cow that gives his children milk; and some
Have offered their own lives. I do not ask
Your life, or any valuable thing;
You spoke but now of the mere chance that some day
You'd sit together by the hearth again;
Renounce that chance, that miserable hour,
And he shall live again.

EMER

I do not question
But you have brought ill luck on all he loves
And now, because I am thrown beyond your power
Unless your words are lies, you come to bargain.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

You loved your power when but newly married
And I love mine although I am old and withered;

You have but to put yourself into that power
And he shall live again.

EMER

No, never, never.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

You dare not be accursed yet he has dared.

EMER

I have but two joyous thoughts, two things I prize,
A hope, a memory, and now you claim that hope.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

He'll never sit beside you at the hearth
Or make old bones, but die of wounds and toil
On some far shore or mountain, a strange woman
Beside his mattress.

EMER

You ask for my one hope
That you may bring your curse on all about him.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

You've watched his loves and you have not been jealous
Knowing that he would tire, but do those tire
That love the Sidhe?

EMER

What dancer of the Sidhe
What creature of the reeling moon has pursued him?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

I have but to touch your eyes and give them sight;
But stand at my left side. (He touches her eyes with his left hand, the right being withered)

EMER

My husband there.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

But out of reach — I have dissolved the dark
That hid him from your eyes but not that other
That's hidden you from his.

EMER

Husband, husband!

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

Be silent, he is but a phantom now
And he can neither touch, nor hear, nor see;
The longing and the cries have drawn him hither.
He heard no sound, heard no articulate sound;
They could but banish rest, and make him dream,
And in that dream, as do all dreaming shades
Before they are accustomed to their freedom,
He has taken his familiar form, and yet
He crouches there not knowing where he is
Or at whose side he is crouched.

(a Woman of the Sidhe has entered and stands a little inside the door)

EMER

Who is this woman?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

She has hurried from the Country-Under-Wave
And dreamed herself into that shape that he
May glitter in her basket; for the Sidhe

Are fishers also and they fish for men
With dreams upon the hook.

EMER

And so that woman
Has hid herself in this disguise and made
Herself into a lie.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

A dream is body;
The dead move ever towards a dreamless youth
And when they dream no more return no more;
And those more holy shades that never lived
But visit you in dreams.

EMER

I know her sort.
They find our men asleep, weary with war,
Or weary with the chase and kiss their lips
And drop their hair upon them, from that hour
Our men, who yet knew nothing of it all,
Are lonely, and when at fall of night we press
Their hearts upon our hearts their hearts are cold.
(She draws a knife from her girdle)

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

And so you think to wound her with a knife.
She has an airy body. Look and listen;
I have not given you eyes and ears for nothing.
(The Woman of the Sidhe moves round the crouching Ghost of Cuchulain at front of stage in a

dance that grows gradually quicker, as he slowly awakes. At moments she may drop her hair upon his head but she does not kiss him. She is accompanied by string and flute and drum. Her mask and clothes must suggest gold or bronze or brass or silver so that she seems more an idol than a human being. This suggestion may be repeated in her movements. Her hair too, must keep the metallic suggestion.)

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Who is it stands before me there
Shedding such light from limb and hair
As when the moon complete at last
With every labouring crescent past,
And lonely with extreme delight,
Flings out upon the fifteenth night?

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Because I long I am not complete.
What pulled your hands about your feet
And your head down upon your knees,
And hid your face?

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Old memories:
A dying boy, with handsome face
Upturned upon a beaten place;
A sacred yew-tree on a strand;
A woman that held in steady hand
In all the happiness of her youth

Before her man had broken troth,
A burning wisp to light the door;
And many a round or crescent more;
Dead men and women. Memories
Have pulled my head upon my knees.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Could you that have loved many a woman
That did not reach beyond the human,
Lacking a day to be complete,
Love one that though her heart can beat,
Lacks it but by an hour or so.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

I know you now for long ago
I met you on the mountain side,
Beside a well that seemed long dry,
Beside old thorns where the hawk flew.
I held out arms and hands but you,
That now seem friendly, fled away
Half woman and half bird of prey.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Hold out your arms and hands again
You were not so dumbfounded when
I was that bird of prey and yet
I am all woman now.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

I am not
The young and passionate man I was

And though that brilliant light surpass
All crescent forms, my memories
Weigh down my hands, abash my eyes.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Then kiss my mouth. Though memory
Be beauty's bitterest enemy
I have no dread for at my kiss
Memory on the moment vanishes:
Nothing but beauty can remain.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

And shall I never know again
Intricacies of blind remorse?

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Time shall seem to stay his course,
For when your mouth and my mouth meet
All my round shall be complete
Imagining all its circles run;
And there shall be oblivion
Even to quench Cuchulain's drouth,
Even to still that heart.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Your mouth.
(They are about to kiss, he turns away)
O Emer, Emer.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

So then it is she
Made you impure with memory.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Still in that dream I see you stand,
A burning wisp in your right hand,
To wait my coming to the house,
As when our parents married us.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Being among the dead you love her
That valued every slut above her
While you still lived.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

O my lost Emer.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

And there is not a loose-tongued schemer
But could draw you if not dead,
From her table and her bed.
How could you be fit to wive
With flesh and blood, being born to live
Where no one speaks of broken troth
For all have washed out of their eyes
Wind blown dirt of their memories
To improve their sight?

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Your mouth, your mouth.

(Their lips approach but Cuchulain turns away as Emer speaks.)

EMER

If he may live I am content,
Content that he shall turn on me,

If but the dead will set him free
That I may speak with him at whiles,
Eyes that the cold moon or the harsh sea
Or what I know not's made indifferent.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

What a wise silence has fallen in this dark!
I know you now in all your ignorance
Of all whereby a lover's quiet is rent.
What dread so great as that he should forget
The least chance sight or sound, or scratch or mark
On an old door, or frail bird heard and seen
In the incredible clear light love cast
All round about her some forlorn lost day?
That face, though fine enough, is a fool's face
And there's a folly in the deathless Sidhe
Beyond man's reach.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

I told you to forget
After my fashion; you would have none of it;
So now you may forget in a man's fashion.
There's an unbridled horse at the sea's edge.
Mount; it will carry you in an eye's wink
To where the King of Country-Under-Wave,
Old Mananan, nods above the board and moves
His chessmen in a dream. Demand your life
And come again on the unbridled horse.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Forgive me those rough words. How could you know

That man is held to those whom he has loved
By pain they gave, or pain that he has given,
Intricacies of pain.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

I am ashamed
That being of the deathless shades I chose
A man so knotted to impurity.

(The Ghost of Cuchulain goes out)

WOMAN of the SIDHE

(to Figure of Cuchulain)

To you that have no living light, but dropped
From a last leprous crescent of the moon,
I owe it all.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

Because you have failed
I must forego your thanks, I that took pity
Upon your love and carried out your plan
To tangle all his life and make it nothing
That he might turn to you.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Was it from pity
You taught the woman to prevail against me?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

You know my nature— by what name I am called.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Was it from pity that you hid the truth

That men are bound to women by the wrongs
They do or suffer?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

You know what being I am.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

I have been mocked and disobeyed— your power
Was more to you than my good-will, and now
I'll have you learn what my ill-will can do;
I lay you under bonds upon the instant
To stand before our King and face the charge
And take the punishment.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

I'll stand there first.
And tell my story first, and Mananan
Knows that his own harsh sea made my heart cold.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

My horse is there and shall outrun your horse.
(The Figure of Cuchulain falls back, the Woman of the Sidhe goes out. Drum taps, music resembling horse hoofs.)

EITHNE INGUBA

(entering quickly)

I heard the beat of hoofs, but saw no horse,
And then came other hoofs and after that
I heard low angry cries and thereupon
I ceased to be afraid.

EMER

Cuchulain wakes.

(The figure turns round. It once more wears the heroic mask.)

CUCHULAIN

Eithne Inguba take me in your arms,
I have been in some strange place and am afraid.

(The First Musician comes to the front of stage, the others from each side and unfold the cloth singing)

THE MUSICIANS

What makes her heart beat thus,
Plain to be understood
I have met in a man's house
A statue of solitude,
Moving there and walking;
Its strange heart beating fast
For all our talking.
O still that heart at last.

O bitter reward!
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
And give but a sigh and a word
A passing word.

Although the door be shut
And all seem well enough,

Although wide world hold not
A man but will give you his love
The moment he has looked at you,
He that has loved the best
May turn from a statue
His too human breast.

O bitter reward!
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
Or give but a sigh and a word
A passing word.

What makes your heart so beat?
Some one should stay at her side.
When beauty is complete
Her own thought will have died
And danger not be diminished;
Dimmed at three quarter light
When moon's round is finished
The stars are out of sight.

O bitter reward!
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
Or give but a sigh and a word
A passing word.
(When the cloth is folded again the stage is bare.)

Here ends, 'Two Plays for Dancers:' by William Butler Yeats. Four hundred copies of this book have been printed and published by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats on paper made in Ireland, at the Cuala Press, Churchtown, Dundrum, in the County of Dublin, Ireland. Finished on the tenth day of January in the year nineteen hundred and nineteen.